

John F. Singer House
1318 Singer Place
Pittsburgh
Allegheny County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-433

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2-PITBU
23-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

6. Sources of information: "Elegance of Bygone Era Enhances Modern Living," Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Sunday Magazine (April 2, 1961)

Van Trump, James D. "Gothic Revival in Pittsburgh," Charette (April 1957)

- B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with Structure: John F. Singer was a partner with Alexander Nimick in Singer-Nimick & Co., iron manufacturers. The house was completed in 1869 at a reported cost of \$65,000. Originally part of a large country estate in the small village of Wilkinsburg (now included within the Pittsburgh city limits), the house and chapel stand alone at the center of a residential area bordering on an urban commercial district.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: One of the few extant examples of the Gothic Revival style as applied to a large, millionaire's house (once a country estate) in the Pittsburgh vicinity.
2. Condition of fabric: Generally good

B. Detailed Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions, height, and shape: 59'-6" x 74'-8"; two and one-half stories; irregular rectangular shape.
2. Foundations: Rubble masonry below grade, coursed ashlar where exposed above grade (regular course heights).
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Coursed ashlar (irregular course heights), dark gray in color, with quoins.
4. Structural system, framing: Masonry bearing walls with timber floor and roof framing.
5. Porches: Elevated covered porch incorporated in the projection on the south (front) elevation, three bays wide, one bay deep (the easternmost bay has masonry piers forming an entrance portico). Projecting cornice and paneled frieze supported by remnants of the original bracketed columns and later pipe columns. Modern concrete slab flooring supported by stone piers. Slightly

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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JOHN F. SINGER HOUSE

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Address: 1318 Singer Place, Pittsburgh, Allegheny County,
Pennsylvania

Present Owners: Mrs. Edward McCrady and Mrs. C. K. Harris

Present Occupants: Miss Dolly Harris and tenants

Present Use: Two-family apartment dwelling

Brief Statement of Significance: One of the finest and most elaborate Pittsburgh mansions built in the Gothic Revival Style.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Built in 1869 for John F. Singer and occupied by the Singer family until the early 1880's, the house stood vacant for a time before being used as a bachelors' club, known as Dixon Manor. Purchased by the present owners about 1920, the house is rented to various tenants.
2. Date of erection: About 1869
3. Architect: Probably Samuel Taylor
4. Notes on original plans, construction, etc.: "The house, completed in 1869, was known as 'the most pretentious and elegantly appointed as well as exquisitely furnished individual dwelling within the borough limits.' Workmen were brought from England to do the wood and marble work. Special marble - a different color for each room - was imported from various countries. Also imported were the crystal, porcelain and brass chandeliers, which still remain in the house. Besides the main building, the Singer estate had a boat house and a separate private chapel. [According to the same source, Singer "dredged a lake - 125 feet wide and eight feet deep - and planted vineyards, orchards, and elaborate gardens."] The chapel is now a garage, and the lake and gardens went into building lots decades ago." (See Pittsburgh Post Gazette Sunday Magazine, April 2, 1961).
5. Notes on Alterations: The original structure remains intact with the exception of minor interior alterations on the first floor.

elevated covered porch incorporated in the projections on the north (rear) and east elevations - wraps around the northeast corner, three bays wide on a side, and one bay deep. Projecting cornice and paneled frieze supported by decorative carved bracketed columns. Wood porch floor enclosed by railing with arched balusters.

6. Chimneys: Three low brick chimneys with tile flue stacks.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Main entrance on the south (front) elevation - elevated covered portico with low pedimented battlement. Single opening (recessed wood frame with four-panel door) with pointed arch stone label and three-light transom. Three secondary entrances - one on the north elevation at the rear of the main hallway, one on the east elevation at the end of the side hallway, and one on the west elevation at the kitchen - all with plain square-head stone labels, recessed wood frames, and four-panel doors.
 - b. Windows: Both single and twin (center jamb) double-hung wooden sash with molded frames slightly recessed from the wall plane. Some have pointed arch stone labels and some have concave roof or gable roof bracketed hoods with decorative carved or "jig-sawn" tracery and coping crockets.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Series of steeply pitched intersecting gables, flaring slightly at the eave line and covered with small hexagonal roof slates.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Simple raking cornice and decorative carved bargeboards on the gable ends with quatrafoil tracery at the peaks. Simple bracketed cornice along the eave lines of the gable roofs.
 - c. Dormers: Steeply pitched gable roof dormers with simple raking cornices and decorative "jig-sawn" bargeboards. Either single sash recessed in pointed arch opening, or double sash, each with pointed arch trim all set in an inflected frame.

C. Technical Description of Interiors

1. Floor plans: Central hall on the north-south axis (extends from front to back of house) with flanking rooms. Semicircular main stair and secondary hall to the east. Second-floor plan essentially the same. Attic not accessible.
2. Stairways: Handsome semicircular stair located to the east of the central hall, defined on the first floor by a three-bay arcade formed by heavily carved bracketed columns. Inlaid marble treads enclosed by paneled and carved strings with decorative turned and "jig-sawn" balusters. There is a sculpture niche with pointed arch label located in the wall at the mid-point of the flight. Secondary stair to the second floor located at the north end of the central hall (straight run with U turn and short return) with straight-run stair to the basement located underneath.
3. Flooring: The first-floor halls have inlaid marble floors, with 4" hardwood (various finishes) throughout the rest of the house.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are plaster painted various colors, with some low wainscoting in several of the first-floor rooms. The primary first- and second-floor rooms have very elaborate compound plaster cornices (bands of plain and sculptured foliate moldings) and intricate plaster medallions.
5. Doorways and doors: The primary interior doorways have compound pointed-arch architraves (rich tracery in first-floor hallway openings) with four-panel doors (partial glazing in the first-floor vestibule doors). Several second-floor doorways have three-light (curved triangular) transoms with pivoting center light. The secondary doorways have more simple flat-head architraves with four-panel doors.
6. Trim: Delicate plaster cornices - richly paneled woodwork and window reveals with interior shutters and compound moldings.
7. Hardware: Very plain polished metal knobs and key latches.
8. Lighting: Decorative brass chandeliers in several of the first-floor rooms. Other fixtures are modern.
9. Heating: Modern central heating. Decorative marble mantelpieces - molded trim and spandrels with a center cartouche over the round arch opening.

D. Site

1. Orientation and general setting: Situated, facing south, on a terraced hillside at the center of a residential area bordering on an urban commercial district.
2. Outbuildings: Small two-story chapel (now a garage), contemporary with the main house, is located to the northwest.

Prepared by John D. Milner, Architect
National Park Service
March and October 1963